

MAURICE D. HINCHEY
26TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

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October 2, 2001

James Cody
Director
Veterans Affairs Medical Center
800 Irving Avenue
Syracuse, New York 13210

Dear Mr. Cody:

I am writing to express my profound disappointment with the recent decision of your agency concerning the opening of a Veterans Affairs clinic in Ithaca. As a legislator who fights year after year to increase funding for VA programs, I recognize and appreciate the budget constraints confronting the Upstate VA Network. However, the decision to alter the VA's contract with Cayuga Medical Center (CMC), which specified the opening of clinics in both Ithaca and Cortland, is a great set back for CMC. But more importantly, it is a great disservice to the nearly 7,000 veterans in Tompkins County who have long awaited the opening of a VA clinic in Ithaca.

The contract awarded a year ago to Cayuga Medical Center for operating VA clinics in Ithaca and Cortland held great hope for meeting the health care needs of veterans in this region. For too long, these veterans' access to health care has been compromised by the inconvenient location of the VA's nearest clinics. Sadly, routine health care has been out of reach for many aging veterans unable to travel out of the region during inclement weather. These veterans have greatly anticipated a VA clinic in Ithaca. Accordingly, a decision to delay its opening indefinitely would do irrevocable harm to the relationship between the VA and veterans in Tompkins County.

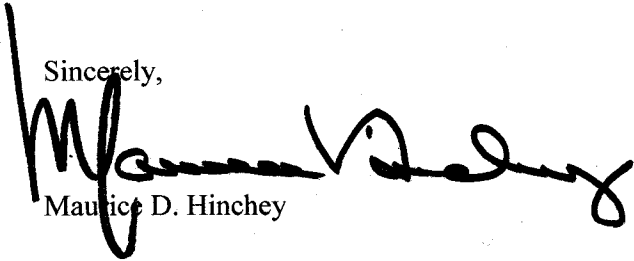
I am also concerned about the adverse impact this decision will have on Cayuga Medical Center. CMC has patiently endured a year of delays caused by those who challenged the original contract award. Nonetheless, they have worked diligently towards opening an Ithaca VA clinic at the earliest possible date. In accordance with the contract, CMC has made a significant financial investment in preparation for the Ithaca VA clinic. A decision to postpone or cancel the opening of the Ithaca VA clinic would place CMC in an extremely difficult position at a time when community hospitals are facing unprecedented financial challenges. CMC has proved to be a compliant and capable partner for the Department of Veteran's Affairs and, quite simply, they deserve better.

Mr. Cody, I recognize the challenges the VA faces in delivering services that match your available resources. However, I believe that a commitment has been made to veterans in Tompkins County and the Cayuga Medical Center; it must not be reversed. For our veterans, what's at stake here is nothing short of the credibility of the promise we make to care for those who answer our nation's call to serve.

I implore you to move forward with opening the Ithaca VA clinic.

Best regards.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Maurice D. Hinchey", written in a cursive style.

Maurice D. Hinchey

MDH: dll